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TREASURY FOR OASIA/WINGLE
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STATE PASS USDA ELECTRONICALLY FOR FAS/ITP
STATE PASS DOL/ILAB SUDHA HALEY
STATE PASS USTR FOR IVES/WEISEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRESS BULLETIN - January 7, 2009

Opinions/Editorials

[1](#)1. ROK-U.S. Response in 2009 to North Korea's Nuclear Issue (Chosun Ilbo, January 7, 2009, Page 31)

Top Headlines

Chosun Ilbo

93 Public Welfare Bills, including Bills on Easing Criminal Penalties, are stalled by National Assembly standoff; (as a result) Low-Income People (who are unable to pay fines) for Minor Breaches receive criminal records.

JoongAng Ilbo, All TVs

ROKG to Invest 50 Trillion Won in "Green New Deal" Project to Bolster National Economy and Create 960,000 New Jobs

Dong-a Ilbo, Hankook Ilbo, Hankyoreh Shinmun,

Segye Ilbo, Seoul Shinmun

Rival Parties Reach Agreement on Disputed Bills;

National Assembly Returns to Normal after 20 Days of Paralysis

Domestic Developments

[1](#)1. According to Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun, Japan plans to conduct a comprehensive survey of marine energy and mineral resources in the East Sea. If Japan decides to include the ROK-controlled Dokdo islets in the East Sea, it will likely rekindle the territorial dispute between the two countries over Dokdo. (Chosun, JoongAng, Dong-a, Segye)

International News

[1](#)1. According to a ROKG source, the Six-Party Working Group Meeting on Peace and Security in Northeast Asia is expected to be held in Russia in mid-February. (Seoul)

Media Analysis

North Korea

Yoon Duk-min, professor at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, opined in conservative Chosun Ilbo: "Preoccupied

with the Middle East issue, the Obama Administration is likely to follow in the footsteps of its predecessor, the Bush Administration, by focusing more on managing the North Korean nuclear issue than adopting an aggressive diplomatic approach to dismantle the North's nuclear weapons. The Obama Administration should not make the mistake of jeopardizing East Asia, (while) distracted by the Middle East issue. 'Change' is Obama's slogan. In this regard, it is high time for a change in U.S. policy on North Korea. The U.S. should come up with a proper policy on North Korea, even if it takes time."

Gaza

The ROK media reported that Israel is expanding its military offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip without accepting cease-fire calls by the international community. Citing foreign media, the ROK media put the total Palestinian death toll since Dec. 27 at close to 700. French President Nicholas Sarkozy was quoted as urging both sides to stop the fighting during a Jan. 5 visit to the Middle East.

Conservative Chosun Ilbo's International News Reporter Choi Joon-seok wrote: "The Israeli attacks on Gaza are excessive enough to be called an 'asymmetrical war,' even though Hamas provoked them. The Israelis were able to rebuild their country in the land of Palestine because they were the victims, not the perpetrators. However, Israel no longer appears to be either a weak nation or a victim."

Russia-Ukraine Gas Dispute

The ROK media carried straight, inside-page reports saying that Russia has cut its gas exports to Europe through Ukraine by 30 percent in a sharp escalation of a dispute with Ukraine over energy. Left-leaning Hankyoreh Shinmun cited International Herald Tribune as analyzing that the Russian move might be intended to induce Europe to be involved in this gas dispute as a mediator.

Opinions/Editorials

ROK-U.S. Response in 2009 to North Korea's Nuclear Issue
(Chosun Ilbo, January 7, 2009, Page 31)

By Yoon Duk-min, professor at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security

The "Six-Party Talks" cannot realize denuclearization.

If the nuclear threat is neglected, it will set off a nuclear domino effect in Northeast Asia.

It has been 20 years since the North Korean nuclear issue became a matter of primary concern in the international community. We have engaged in negotiations with the North over the past two decades, ever since France's commercial satellite imagery of clandestine nuclear facilities at Yongbyon drew international attention in 1989. To date, there have been five changes of government in the ROK from the Roh Tae-woo, Kim Yong-sam, Kim Dae-jung, Roh Moo-hyun administrations to the current Lee Myung-bak administration. In the U.S., too, there have been four changes of government, including the incoming Obama administration. Whenever there was a change of government in the U.S., there was also a change in the negotiation framework due to Pyongyang's perversity. The first nuclear negotiation was held between the two Koreas, and during the Clinton Administration, high-level U.S.-North Korea talks and four-party talks were held. During the current Bush Administration, six parties have gathered for nuclear talks. Although there have been many agreements on North Korea's nuclear abandonment, such as the 1992 Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the 1994 U.S.-North Korea Geneva Agreed Framework, and the September 19 Joint Statement, there are still no signs that Pyongyang has given up its nuclear development. Rather, it pushed for a nuclear test even while the Six-Party Talks were being held. Furthermore, the North is continuously carrying out high-explosive tests in order to sophisticate its atomic bombs, and is also testing the engines of ballistic missiles, which will carry nuclear bombs. The nuclear test facilities are still in operation. Frankly speaking, I cannot shake off the feeling that even though the Six-Party Talks are producing many agreements, the North is

continuing to take steady steps toward its nuclear armament. What is certain is that the current nuclear negotiation process cannot prevent the North from developing its nuclear weapons.

The North's denuclearization process will be at a crossroads in 2009. For the past eight years, the Bush Administration was so preoccupied with the Middle East situation, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, that it concentrated its efforts on preventing nuclear proliferation, rather than on denuclearizing the North. Furthermore, since Pyongyang's nuclear test in October 2006, the Bush Administration has virtually overlooked North Korea's provisional nuclear armament. "Nuclear weapons" were not on the list of nuclear programs that would be abandoned pursuant to the February 13, 2007 Agreement, and "nuclear weapons" and "enriched uranium" were not included in a nuclear declaration to be submitted under the October 2007 Agreement. U.S. President-elect Obama had criticized the Bush Administration during his election campaign, saying that North Korea's nuclear weapons increased four times during Bush's term. At the end of the day, what policy the incoming Obama Administration will take is the key to this issue.

President-elect Obama stressed the need for imposing sanctions against nations that breached the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, such as North Korea, while expressing his willingness to pursue direct negotiations with North Korea. In short, he seeks to adopt a "strong and direct diplomatic approach." But there are concerns that, like the Bush Administration, the Obama Administration may be overwhelmed by imminent issues other than the North Korea issue. Above all, it should overcome the current financial crisis. And it will not be easy to put an end to war on terror, as shown in the Mumbai attacks. Worse yet, the conflicts between Israel and Hamas are likely to escalate into the 5th Middle East War. Faced with layers of urgent issues, the Obama Administration may put the North Korean nuclear issue on the backburner. Immersed in dealing with the Middle East issue, President-elect Obama is likely to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor George W. Bush who focused on just managing the North Korean nuclear issue, rather than adopting an aggressive diplomatic approach in order to dismantle its nuclear weapons.

There should be a change. As time goes by, North Korean nuclear armament will become an inevitable reality. We cannot afford to tolerate dangerous coexistence with a nuclear-armed North Korea. Some Japanese have already raised the need for their country's own nuclear armament. If the grave nuclear threat facing our ally is neglected, it will set off a domino effect of nuclear proliferation.

The Obama Administration should not make the mistake of putting the safety of East Asia in jeopardy, distracted by the Middle East issue. It should no longer adhere to the existing North Korea policy swayed by its brinkmanship. Obama's top priority is change. Change in the U.S. policy toward North Korea is urgently needed. The Obama Administration should come up with sound policy on North Korea, even if it will take time. We expect President-elect Obama's strong initiative to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue in 2009.

Stephens